

Isaiah 62:1-5

Psalms 36:5-10

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

John 2:1-11

### **Notes on the Epistle Lesson**

It has been said that for those who work in churches, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians is either the most frustrating or the most comforting of Paul's letters. It is comforting to know that even the Apostle Paul had to deal with issues that trouble our churches today. (The Corinthian church even had arguments about people bringing too little food and eating too much at the potluck dinners! -- 1 Corinthians 11:17 – 22) On the other hand, it is frustrating that in almost two thousand years, we are still plagued by some of the same problems that remain unsolved.

Perhaps the key problem facing the Corinthian congregation was the divisions within the church. One of these divisive issues concerned the matter of spiritual gifts. The people who experienced ecstatic speech during worship considered themselves to be more spiritual and better Christians than those who did not. In our passage this week, Paul states firmly that all people have spiritual gifts and that none is superior to any other. A church that fails to recognize this diversity and equality of gifts is divided and this division is contrary to the will of God.

### **Notes on the Gospel Lesson**

This account is one of the most familiar of Jesus' miracles, receiving extra notice because it is his first "sign". Yet with its familiarity often comes a lack of attention to some details that can be extremely illuminating.

It is curious that Jesus, his family, and his disciples were at a wedding in Cana. Usually, people attended weddings in their own village. Although Nazareth and Cana are not far apart (about ten miles) the only likely reason that people would travel to another village would be if there was family involved. This in itself would be unusual as a person almost always lived their entire lives in the same village. However, as noted below, the bridegroom was almost most likely related to Jesus' family in some way. Also remember that the disciple Nathanael was from Cana (John 21:2); the same Nathanael who asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" There was apparently some hostility between the two villages.

Incidentally, first century Cana was not located at the modern village of Cana which is adjacent to Nazareth. The village in the first century was located on the northern edge of the Beit Netofah Valley across from the city of Sepphoris.

The culture of hospitality is deeply ingrained in the Middle East. While we in the southern United States pride ourselves on providing hospitality to guests, the extent that those in the Middle East will go to provide it far exceeds our own. To run out of wine at a wedding feast would bring great shame to the host family; a shame that would be shared by everyone in the village. Mary's concern when the wine ran out indicates a blood relationship to the host family. While there has been much speculation on the identity of the couple being married at this wedding, they can not be identified with any certainty.

Mary was not asking Jesus to perform a miracle. Remember that he had done no deeds of power at this point. There is no evidence that anyone knew that he could do so. Mary was stating that a distressing condition existed. Probably she wanted Jesus to go buy some more wine. In any case, Jesus' response, which was extremely rude by Middle Eastern standards, would have likely bewildered her. Still, she turned the problem over to him.

There was only one use in the first century for stone jars. One of the most important rites of Judaism was purification in a ritual bath or *miqvah*. The requirements for a *miqvah* and the water used in it are very specific. The water must be "living water", meaning that it must come from God; either from a spring or from collected rainwater. If the water is collected, it must be kept in a jar made by God. Regular pottery was unacceptable. Only stone jars were suitable. (God had made the stone even if human hands had carved the stone into a jar.) It was this living water, set aside for ritual purification, that Jesus turned into wine. On a side note, thinking of living water as the instrument of purification, consider again Jesus' words to the woman of Samaria (John 4:10 – 14).